

The Monitor

September 2014 – March 2015

Dear Readers,

This edition of *The Monitor* covers our office's activities from late September 2014 to March 2015. We publish the Monitor to keep you informed about our work in the office of the [Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism](#) (SEAS). The SEAS office is now located in the Office of [Religion and Global Affairs](#), which is headed by Secretary Kerry's Special Representative, Shaun Casey.

From the fall of 2014 through the winter of 2014/2015 our office initiated three trips to Europe visiting eight countries – including two trips both to France and Belgium. These overseas trips included attendance at conferences, meetings with representatives of European governments, heads of NGOs and Jewish communal leadership in each country. In addition, this edition covers a number of important meetings and activities undertaken by our office in the United States. Crucial to our work is the engagement of our embassies and consulates in fighting anti-Semitism.

For more regular updates, you can follow me on Twitter ([@SEASForman](#)) where I comment on the latest developments, issues, and events surrounding anti-Semitism and the protection of Jewish communities around the world.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of our work.

Respectfully,

Ira Forman



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International Travel

September 2014

Belgium

We began our [trip](#) to Belgium, Netherlands and France by attending a conference, “Peace is the Future,” of a well-known Catholic NGO, Sant’Egidio, in Antwerp. The conference focused on inter-faith dialogue and I had an opportunity to meet and talk to many different faith leaders.

After the conclusion of the conference I met with Antwerp Jewish leaders who expressed disappointment that the Belgian government in July did not speak out against anti-Semitic incidents that took place during the Gaza conflict. They expressed the hope that the incoming Belgian government would show a greater interest in denouncing public displays of anti-Semitism. Although the harassment of Jews is not particularly pronounced in Antwerp, community leaders noted the number of anti-Semitic incidents had spiked in recent months, and they were deeply concerned with the overall lack of support from Belgian society. They felt that if the Belgian government continued to fail to protect its Jewish minority, this would ultimately result in the loss of religious freedom for other Belgians as well.

In the Belgian capital we met Alain Lefevre, the Director of the Belgian Crisis Center, and we discussed the Jewish community’s desire for more security personnel to protect its institutions. Director Lefevre noted that the long-term costs of some security measures are extremely expensive. Jewish leaders I met with in Brussels expressed a strong interest in the creation of an EU-level position to combat anti-Semitism. They believed this would offer more assurance to European Jewish communities and that the U.S. could be a crucial advocate for the creation of special envoys to combat anti-Semitism in Europe. We also met with the Brussels Jewish communal leadership. Like their colleagues in Antwerp, they expressed grave concern over the failure of national and civic leadership to stand up to manifestations of anti-Semitism during the summer protests against Israeli actions in Gaza. We also met with Jewish organizations who work with EU institutions and other national government representatives.

Netherlands



Interfaith lunch in The Hague (State Department photo)

We visited The Hague from September 9-10 to discuss the summertime surge in anti-Semitic incidents with a wide group of interlocutors. I met with the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI), who reported that online and social media hate speech and acts of violence -- which had peaked during the summer -- had stabilized by September. Still, CIDI believed that recent incidents outnumbered prior periods of anti-Semitism associated with Middle East crises.



Meeting with rabbis in The Hague (State Department photo)

Other Jewish leaders reported a continued sense of fear that a random act of extreme violence could occur, citing the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, which killed four. Most agreed that the Dutch government responded fairly well to the summer incidents, with strong statements from Prime Minister Rutte and Foreign Minister Timmermans, as well as increased efforts from law enforcement in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. While some praised the increase in security at Jewish institutions and schools, others found it unsettling for their young children to be surrounded by armed guards. A number of Jewish leaders also felt greatly disappointed by the lack of response from Dutch civil society.

France

From September 12-16, we met with Jewish community leaders in Paris. One of our first meetings was with Rabbi Serge Benhaim whose Synagogue de la Roquette was besieged during the anti-Israel protests last July 13. Thanks to the presence of the French police and volunteers from the Jewish Community Security Service (SPCJ), the anti-Israel protesters were never able to enter the synagogue. As of September, two policemen were posted outside the synagogue 24 hours a day. Rabbi Benhaim expressed his concern for members of the congregation and the Jewish French community who are subject to anti-Semitic insults from some young North African males. He also noted that some Jewish children no longer feel safe at public schools because of harassment, mainly from students of North African origin. Rabbi Benhaim was pleased with the public outcry from French officials, yet felt the Jewish community needed increased security.



Meeting with Jewish community leaders at Synagogue de la Roquette (State Department photo)

During my visit to Paris, I also met with Rabbi Laurent Berros, from the suburb of Sarcelles. Sarcelles is home to a large Jewish community of North African heritage as well as larger Muslim communities of Sub-Saharan, Turkish and North African origin. Concurrent with the Gaza conflict, during the summer, there were a series of attacks on Jewish businesses from protesters; these individuals threw firebombs at Jewish markets and pharmacies, shattered windows, and looted shops. In the wake of these incidents some Jewish families moved to safer communities in Paris and others left for Israel. Jewish leaders cautioned that if anti-Semitism continued to persist at such levels, the Sarcelles Jewish community of 15,000 could eventually disappear.

Our Embassy also arranged a luncheon at Chargé Uzra Zeya's home with French Jewish organizational leadership. It was the first time our Chargé opened her home for official entertainment. Jewish leaders expressed very strong praise for the way the government of France

spoke out against the violence and demonstrations during the summer protests—the statements of President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls were particularly noted. Nonetheless, many Jewish leaders were deeply concerned by the lack of response from French civil society. One organizational leader summarized the crisis in France by saying “...this is not about the Jewish community’s future but ultimately this is about the values of the French Republic.” We also had a fascinating discussion about the implications of continued high levels of anti-Semitism on Jewish life and Jewish demographics. We were told that nearly everyone in the community talks about emigration but that in the end most will stay even if these trends continue. However, they added that if the situation worsened, some would leave, their communal structures would be weakened and pressures to assimilate and drop all connections with the community would grow.

Poland



HDIM meeting with civil society and government leaders (State Department photo)

In late September I returned to Europe to attend the annual [Human Dimension Implementation Meeting](#) (HDIM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in Warsaw, Poland. HDIM is Europe’s largest human rights conference where civil society leaders, international experts, human rights activists, and government representatives from 57 OSCE participating States gather to review progress on human rights commitments in the region, discuss related challenges, and make recommendations for improvements on human rights issues. The conference highlighted the need to strengthen efforts to combat anti-Semitism given the spike in hate speech and physical attacks targeting Jewish communities and religious institutions around the world. Many present highlighted the importance of the then-upcoming (November 2014) OSCE Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism and called on participating states to implement more concrete measures to protect their Jewish communities.

October 2014

Poland



With Polish NGO and Embassy Warsaw colleagues (State Department Photo)

At the end of October, I traveled to Warsaw as part of a Presidential Delegation, headed by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, to the October 28 opening of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Both President Bronislaw Komorowski of Poland and President Reuben Rivlin of Israel spoke. The museum stands in what was once the heart of Jewish Warsaw, which the Nazis turned into the Warsaw Ghetto, and which was devastated during the Warsaw Uprising of 1943. The museum was founded by the City of Warsaw, the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland with the support of private donors from the U.S. and other countries. POLIN documents the thousand-year history of Polish Jewry, focusing not just on Jewish tragedies like the Holocaust in Poland but on the vibrant civilization that thrived in Poland for a millennium and which continues even today.

November 2014

Germany



In Berlin with Ambassador Power (left) and Ambassador Baer (center)
(State Department Photo)

Our Ambassador to the United Nations [Samantha Power](#) led a Presidential Delegation to Berlin for a 10th anniversary event commemorating the OSCE's groundbreaking [Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism](#) and taking stock of efforts by member states to combat anti-Semitism. Once again I was part of a Presidential Delegation—this one included our Ambassador to the OSCE Daniel Baer and Ambassador to Germany John Emerson.

This high-level commemorative event, hosted by the [OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#) and the German Foreign Ministry, brought together 200 civil society representatives from over 150 organizations, hundreds of government officials, and top-level delegates from OSCE's participating states. The two-day meeting evaluated the implementation of OSCE commitments to combat anti-Semitism set forth a decade ago, considered best practices, and assessed civil society engagement with OSCE member states.

Throughout the conference we heard powerful statements from U.S. civil society, European Jewish community representatives, and European Jewish youth leaders about their experiences dealing with anti-Semitism and hate speech on the internet. One theme of the two-day event was the conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in recent years. A second theme our delegation emphasized was the need to engage civil society, and particularly non-Jewish NGOs, in the fight against anti-Semitism. More than one speaker made it clear that the issue of anti-Semitism is not just a Jewish issue but an issue of fundamental human rights.

January - February 2015

Czech Republic

I attended the European Jewish Congress' (EJC) fourth "Let My People Live," conference in Prague on January 26, to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance day as well as the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The annual event was organized by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the behest of EJC. Government leaders, official delegations, Members of the European Parliament, and Jewish activists had the opportunity to discuss recommendations for politicians and public intellectuals to address the current spike in anti-Semitism in Europe. On January 27 we visited the Terezin concentration camp outside Prague to attend a special commemoration that included a number of Holocaust survivors.

France

I then traveled to Paris to speak with French Jewish leaders in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher Jewish market attacks. For my initial meeting I traveled to the Paris suburb of Créteil where I met with the President of the Jewish community of the Val-de-Marne Department and Créteil as well as other Jewish leaders from Créteil. We spoke about present and future concerns for the security of the Jewish community. The Great Synagogue of Créteil was one of over 600 Jewish institutions in France which were guarded by a dozen military personnel as part of the post-Charlie Hebdo security measures taken by the French Government. Jewish leaders I met often referred to their desire to remain in France but I also heard from a handful of individuals who asked if it would be possible to immigrate to the United States should conditions worsen. In another meeting with young interfaith community leaders, I heard about cooperation between Jewish and Muslim groups around common topics such as ritual circumcision and halal and kosher practices. I also met with the French Council of the Muslim Faith President and Rector of Paris Grand Mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, and other Muslim community leaders to discuss violence targeting the Jewish community, as well as ways in which both the Muslim and Jewish communities can organize to fight discrimination.

Belgium

From Paris I traveled to Brussels where I met with European Union Jewish leaders, Belgian officials, and Jewish community leaders from Brussels and Antwerp. The Belgian Jewish community leaders indicated the new national government seems to be more willing to publicly condemn violence and threats of violence against the Jewish community than the previous government -- noting the speech by Prime Minister Michel at Brussels' Grand Synagogue in the wake of the January attacks in Paris. Community leaders informed me that while concerns over violence remain high in their community, the Belgian Government has augmented security in many Jewish institutions. In a meeting with the Chief of Staff for Brussels Minister-President Rudy Vervoort, Yves Goldstein, we explored the possibility of strengthening education as a means to reduce anti-Semitism. Mr. Goldstein proposed that Belgian students need to have the opportunity to learn about all belief systems, instead of just their own religion as is currently the case in Belgian schools. He argued that anti-Semitism is a consequence of a larger problem in which many youth, particularly of Muslim backgrounds, do not feel welcome in Belgian society, and that Belgian leaders must do more to ease integration and develop an acceptance for Western values. I also met with Antoine Evrard, the Diplomatic Advisor to Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, to whom I expressed the United States' appreciation for some of the Prime Minister's statements.

At a roundtable hosted by Rabbi Menachem Margolin - the General Director of the European Jewish Association - I met with nineteen EU Jewish leaders from such countries as Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro and the UK. We discussed the types of anti-Semitism they face in their countries in the wake of the violence in France and the summer demonstrations. Each of them faces a unique set of circumstances but everyone from Western and Northern Europe was concerned about threats of violence and security for their people and institutions; some of them have faced personal threats themselves. Some Jewish leaders called for a Special Envoy to combat anti-Semitism in Europe at the EU level, some called for one at the national level, and others argued for positions at both levels. Nonetheless, they all agree that a position to monitor anti-Semitism is desperately needed within European bureaucracies.

France

After my two-day stay in Brussels, I returned to Paris for a day where I had the opportunity to meet with the Central Consistory of France, which was holding a conference about the protection of Jewish sites. The Central Consistory dates back 200 years, when Napoleon I created it as the executive body to govern all Jewish congregations in France and officially represent Jewish concerns to the government. Today, the Consistory consists of a network of over 500 synagogues and shrines and represents the Jewish community on issues ranging from security and anti-Semitism to Jewish life. During the conference I was part of a panel, which included two French government officials: the new special Prefect in charge of Jewish communal security in the Interior Ministry and the special inter-ministerial Prefect working from the office of the President of the Republic to develop longer-term strategies for combatting anti-Semitism.

March 2015

Sweden

Most recently, I visited both Sweden and Denmark. In Stockholm I met with Jewish community leaders and Swedish government officials. Although the Jewish community in Stockholm asserted that they did not face the same type of problems as their co-religionists in the Swedish southern city of Malmö, they were still concerned that fighting in the Middle East involving Israel would spur anti-Semitic sentiments. They also felt that their government must do more to provide adequate security measures for synagogues and Jewish schools and were worried about the lack of sufficient funding for security guards. For their part, government officials acknowledged that more had to be done to confront anti-Semitism in Sweden.

When I visited Malmö, I sat down with the mayor, youth activists, interfaith groups, and Jewish community leaders. The Jewish community has been shrinking for some time. Today there are approximately 450 official members of the community and perhaps another 1,000 unaffiliated individuals. Jews have been leaving the city to seek better economic and cultural environments but also because of anti-Semitism from the city's immigrant population. A local rabbi often faces insults, particularly when he walks to the synagogue.

Malmö's mayor pledged to combat racism and anti-Semitism in all its forms in the city, adding that she was also focused on building trust with the Jewish community. The Jewish community reiterated that the national government, regional government, and the city administration needed to do more for community security and to fight anti-Semitic attitudes among immigrants in the region.

The most inspiring part of my visit involved meeting students at the *Videdalsskolan* middle school in Malmö. These teenagers, who were from a mix of racial, ethnic and religious

backgrounds, are part of a student club dedicated to fighting anti-Semitism and racism in Malmö's schools and in their neighborhoods.



With the Rabbi of Malmö, Rabbi Shneur Kesselman
(State Department Photo)



Surrounded by youth activists in Malmö middle school
(State Department Photo)

On March 14, I attended the Raoul Wallenberg Medal Ceremony at the Swedish Parliament celebrating the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. Last year, the U.S. Congress awarded a Congressional Gold Medal to Wallenberg and the Wallenberg family decided to loan the Medal to the Swedish Parliament for 10 years, so that it may be displayed in the Parliament building. The ceremony was attended by the Wallenberg family, U.S. Ambassador Mark Brzezinski, many Holocaust survivors (some of whom owed their lives to Wallenberg's heroism), members of parliament, and the general public. I found Ambassador Brzezinski and the embassy staff actively involved with the Jewish community and deeply committed to fighting anti-Semitism. You can view a video commentary of the ceremony by U.S. Embassy Stockholm [here](#).



With U.S. Ambassador Mark Brzezinski (center) at the Swedish Parliament (State Department photo)

Denmark

I visited Denmark from March 17-20 to speak with Jewish leaders and a number of government officials about the security of the Danish Jewish community, which has come under scrutiny with the recent terrorist attacks in Copenhagen. Following the February 15 attack at the Copenhagen Synagogue, which killed one Jewish security guard, the Jewish community has criticized the government for not having responded soon enough to provide security. They pointed out that the guards that were in place at the Copenhagen Synagogue during the shooting only arrived after the initial February 14 terrorist attack against the Krudtønden, and after repeated requests from the Jewish community. This delay in response, coupled with the fact that the security guards were poorly trained, demonstrated that the government's security plan needs much improvement. The community is working with the Ministry of Justice to increase security at Jewish sites.

Events in the United States

Roundtable on Anti-Semitism



With Secretary of State John Kerry and Jewish organization leaders (Department of State photo)

On September 2, 2014, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Tom Malinowski and I hosted a meeting with Jewish community leaders from the U.S. and Europe to examine the alarming increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric, vandalism, and violence in July and August. Secretary of State John Kerry participated, as well as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson and Acting Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Paul Jones. Secretary Kerry noted the U.S. government's "deep concern about the prevalence and pervasiveness of anti-Semitic threats and attacks against Jewish individuals, houses of worship, and businesses during the past few months."

During this half-day-long meeting we also had the opportunity to talk to our guests about what we were seeing abroad, what the Department is doing to address these incidents, and how

embassies and consulates are helping on the ground. We had a thought-provoking presentation from three European Jewish leaders -- their descriptions of the anti-Semitism they face were a revelation to some of us. Afterward, we heard suggestions from American Jewish leaders, including a desire to see similar offices created to monitor and combat anti-Semitism in Europe.

Meeting with Facebook on countering Hate Speech

I met with the Head of Global Policy Management at Facebook Monica Bickert twice last year. Ms. Bickert has traveled extensively to meet with Jewish leaders and other human rights advocates to better understand the nature and scope of hate speech and what Facebook can do to thwart the misuse of its service. We spoke at length about how social network platforms can use "terms of service" to remove anti-Semitic material. Ms. Bickert shared that there is a growing workforce within Facebook to address these issues.

Third Annual International Religious Freedom Roundtable

Midway through September, I addressed the Third Annual International Religious Freedom Roundtable on Capitol Hill regarding anti-Semitism in Europe as well as how the State Department reacted to the violence and hate speech that some Western European Jewish communities faced over the summer. The event focused on increasing the engagement of government officials with faith-based communities, NGOs, and religious freedom and human rights advocates to better equip these groups to address religious freedom issues worldwide. I, along with other speakers, provided some practical recommendations on how civil society and governments can work together to better target human rights violators.

Meeting with Jewish Organizations

In December 2014, our office hosted its regular meeting with representatives of national Jewish organizations to brief them on recent initiatives and hear their perspectives on world-wide anti-Semitism. Joining me was Shaun Casey, the Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs (S/RGA), and colleagues from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor's (DRL) Office of International Religious Freedom (DRL/IRF). Shaun and I spoke about our office's transition from DRL to S/RGA, a new office created by the Secretary in response to the [White House National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement](#). We noted that while I am moving, we will continue to work closely with DRL/IRF. I also reported on my latest initiatives and trips to Europe after the events of the previous summer.

United Nations General Assembly Meeting on Anti-Semitism

On January 22, the first-ever meeting on anti-Semitism was held in the United Nations General Assembly. About 60 countries participated in the debate concerning the growing violence and discrimination affecting Jewish communities around the world. Ambassador to the United Nations [Samantha Power](#) called for more action against anti-Semitism, noting that this issue persists even in the U.S., and demanded more engagement from both government and civil society leaders.

Online Outreach

State.gov

I encourage all of you to visit our page <http://www.state.gov/s/rga/seas/index.htm> on the U.S.

Department of State's website. Here you will find information about our office, as well as remarks, press releases, past issues of The Monitor, and photos. I also encourage you to visit the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor page at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/index.htm>.

HumanRights.gov

You can also visit [HumanRights.gov](http://www.humanrights.gov), which is the U.S. government's official website for international human rights related information.

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